

WASHINGTON, D.C. - On Tuesday, the opening day of the 111th Congress, Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) re-introduced legislation that would broadly reform how the country approaches ocean governance. The bill, titled the "Ocean Conservation, Education and National Strategy for the 21st Century Act," received the bill number H.R. 21.

Known as Oceans-21, this legislation is the product of years of bi-partisan work and is based on recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Oceans Commission reports. The bill was first introduced in July 2004 in the 108th Congress and has been revised with input from ocean and fishing groups.

"The ocean is vital to the survival of our planet and the advancement of our people, but all too often we treat it with neglect, hauling out resources as fast as possible while dumping waste with abandon," Rep. Farr said. "This bill has been perfected over the past few years, and I'm confident that under a new administration we'll see quick action."

Last year, the bill was cleared by the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans with a vote of 11-3, but the offshore drilling debate stalled further consideration. This year, it's expected that Oceans-21 will pick up where it left off last year, meaning it will be set for full committee consideration before moving to the House floor.

"Industries tied to the ocean and Great Lakes pump billions into our economy, but those resources aren't infinite. We must treat these assets with the care they deserve," Rep. Farr said. "We're faced with collapsing fisheries, water quality problems, harmful algal blooms and dead zones and an increase in invasive species. It's time that Washington recognize these trends and work to correct them."

Oceans-21 would:

- Consolidate national management of oceans and create system of regional governance.
- Create an ocean advisor in the president's cabinet.
- Create regional and national ocean advisory committees.
- Formally make NOAA the chief oceans agency.
- Coordinate federal and state agencies.

- Create a trust fund to support regional governance.

"Regional partnerships are the heart of this legislation, putting control of the ocean where it belongs: in the hands of local stakeholders who know their waters best," Rep. Farr said. "More than 120 laws and 20 federal agencies oversee the ocean, but we have little coordination of these often overlapping rules and jurisdictions. It's time to fix that."

#